The UGC provides plan grants to all eligible Central and State Universities and affiliated colleges under its plan schemes as per the prescribed norms and subject to the availability of resources. The plan proposals received from all the eligible universities and colleges are examined by the experts, nominated by UGC for deciding the quantum of plan assistance to various grantees under the UGC schemes. As the existing system is working satisfactorily, there is no need to direct the UGC to modify the existing formula for providing grants to the universities.

Speed of Howrah-Delhi Rajdhani

†*458. SHRI DEVDAS APTE: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether any instructions have been issued by the Ministry of Railways, to slow down the speed of Howrah-Delhi Rajdhani Express, between Dhanbad and Mughalsarai; and

(b) if so, whether the Ministry has announced its information?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI NITISH KUMAR): (a) and (b) A temporary speed restriction of 75 km/h has been imposed on Dhanbad, Mughalsarai and Danapur Divisions of East Central Railway and Madhupur-Jhajha section of Eastern Railway during night time as a precautionary measure on security considerations. This has resulted temporarily in the partial slowing down and resultant late running of the Howrah-New Delhi Rajdhani Expresses. In case the temporary speed restriction is extended further for a significant period, the schedule of Howrah-New Delhi Rajdhani Express will be revised and the public notified.

Air pollution

*459. SHRI R. SHUNMUGASUNDARAM: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that pollution level in the air in our country went up by 50 per cent in the last decade, as found by the Department of Space, Thiruvananthapuram, which has been monitoring the aerosol levels; and

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(b) if so, what steps are being taken to bring down the pollution level in air in the country?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) Space Physics Laboratory (SPL) of Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) has been monitoring aerosol optical depth at three locations, namely, Trivandrum, Visakhapatnam and Mysore over the last 16 years. The optical depths have shown a steady increase from 0.25 in 1985 to 0.38 in 2002 at Trivandrum and Mysore. There is, however, a decrease from 0.43 to 0.36 at Visakhapatnam during the same period. The trends are region specific and are influenced by changes in aerosol number concentration, size, distribution and chemical composition.

(b) Government have initiated various steps to control air pollution in the country which, *inter alia*, include:

* Notification of emission standards for various industries under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
* Identification of critically polluted areas and preparation of action plans for restoration of environmental quality.
* Promotion of cleaner technologies for control of industrial pollution.
* Appropriate siting of industries to minimise impact on eco-systems.
* Control of vehicular pollution through promotion of clean fuels, introduction of stringent emission norms and fuel specifications.
* Strengthening the monitoring network and institutional capabilities to facilitate and improve enforcement mechanism.

PSU/private sector fertilizer units

†*460. SHRIMATI JAMANA DEVI BARUPAL: Will the Minister of CHEMICALS and FERTILIZERS be pleased to state:

(a) the total number of fertilizer producing units in India, both in the public sector and private sectors, giving the State-wise details thereof;

(b) the impact of liberalization policy of Government on the Indian fertilizer industry; and

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.